

## **Religious Realignments and Democratic Resilience: A Comparative Study of Religious Responses to (Geo)Political Crises**

Contemporary Europe is experiencing a variety of crises – political, economic, and social. The war in Ukraine as well as the resurgence of nationalist tendencies in many European countries and the popularity of right-wing populism have revealed the fragility of European democratic structures. These crises require a response not only from political or social actors, but also from religious ones. At this critical juncture, Europe's largest Churches are forced to navigate between theological reflection and social engagement in the face of crises, but also the need to reposition themselves in relation to the political sphere.

The RELIDEM project aims to explore how the Churches in four countries bordering Russia – Finland, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine – are responding to the crisis of the escalating war in Ukraine (from 2022 onwards) and the crisis of democracy resulting from the rise in nationalist sentiments. We are also interested in whether and how, in the context of these responses, the Churches are changing their theological framing of the crisis and, more broadly, modifying their very understanding of what theology is and what role it plays. The subject of our research is the official positions of the selected Churches, the statements of their officials, and also the views represented by members of religious communities and those involved in grassroots religious initiatives. The project covers the majority Churches (Roman Catholic in Poland and Lithuania, Lutheran in Finland and Orthodox in Ukraine) as well as selected minority Churches in each country (Orthodox in Poland, Lithuania and Finland, and Greek Catholic in Ukraine). This provides a unique opportunity for a comparative analysis of how religious organisations are responding to the current crises and how their responses are influenced by the historical circumstances and contemporary contexts in which they operate.

Religion often serves as a pillar of social cohesion and as a moral compass. Tracing the responses of Churches to different types of crises allows for a broader reflection on how religious organisations adapt to the changing socio-political landscapes. The RELIDEM project intends to demonstrate how they build their positions, sustain their authority and influence the socio-political reality around them in the face of external challenges and changing alliances. The analysis of the Churches' responses to crises allows us to reflect on the extent to which religious rhetoric and religious moral positions shape political decisions, public sentiment and dialogue on key issues at national and transnational levels. Crises also force religious organisations and communities to engage in deep theological reflection and ethical deliberation, which can result in either reaffirmation, modification or abandonment of existing principles or practices. This transformative journey and its outcomes have significant implications for the adherents of particular religions and for the wider communities in which Churches operate. Understanding how religious organisations respond to crises provides valuable insights into their role in supporting social cohesion and political stability or, on the contrary, exacerbating social divisions. This knowledge is essential for policy makers, religious leaders and the civil sector.